

Abstract

This essay describes the needs involved in developing a new knowledge management strategy for the “Aries Inc.”. “Aries Inc.” is one of the key players in the IT market worldwide, with a large portfolio of products and services. Knowledge Management is one of “Aries Inc.”’s key strategic initiatives. This essay covers what knowledge management needs “Aries Inc.” might have, key enablers to knowledge management, and critical success factors.

Keywords: knowledge management, company report, policy recommendations

It is widely acknowledged that an organizational knowledge management strategy is a desired forerunner of the development of particular knowledge management initiatives. The development of such a strategy is often arduous in the face of lack of organizational comprehension of knowledge management and other organizational intensions. This essay describes the needs involved in developing a new knowledge management strategy for the “Aries Inc.”. “Aries Inc.” is one of the key players in the IT market worldwide, with a large portfolio of products and services, including hardware (servers, workstations, and storage), software (Internet and desktop programs), and services (support services and professional services). For the purpose of this paper, the main focus will be on the professional services side of “Aries Inc.”’s different activities.

The term “professional services” in IT does not have one particular definition; however, for most IT companies, the term “professional services” is used to cover two main types of services, which are systems integration and IT consulting. However, the professional services industry, which involves systems integration services, legal and tax consulting, is knowledge intensive. Professional services companies trade their knowledge and programs to meet particular client issues. A major justification for large professional services companies’ investment in knowledge management is that it gives them the opportunity to offer clients the profits of the whole company’s experience, not just that of a particular client team. This is only workable through the effective creation, diffusion, and treat of professional knowledge.

The professional services division of “Aries Inc.” started providing services to the company’s local customer base in 2007. At the time, professional services division staff members involved nine consultants focusing mainly on Internet solutions, high-availability solutions, and data management (storage/backup) solutions areas. From 2007 to early 2009, the

average number of projects performed by the professional services division per year was between 60 to 70 projects, with an average of eight projects per staff member per year. These projects were always delivered on time and with high quality giving to the Acceptance Reports signed by the customers. However, in mid-2009, “Aries Inc.” started facing a high turnover rate; six staff members left the company because they were offered more senior positions in other companies or because they resolved to start their own private business. While the departed employees were replaced and the total quantity of employees even grew, the revenues were flat, the quantity of successfully delivered projects dropped, the quantity of incomplete projects grew, and the customer satisfaction level lessened.

Communications needs

According to the prior data gathered, the problem was not only the high turnover rate but the real issue was the results behind this turnover rate, and its growing value with elapsed time. The most identifiable issue was the loss of knowledge, where knowledge leakage did affect the revenues of the company and its image in the local market. Those losses in knowledge caused by high turnover rate have put “Aries Inc.” into a risky situation compared to its local competitors. Today, professional services division consists of 12 members. Anyway, the reports received from customers show many negative symptoms, including flat quantity of projects delivered per year, late implementation of projects, low quality of solutions, and poor qualification of the customers’ requirements. As a solution to “Aries Inc.”’s needs of a lack of effectiveness, several actions have been recommended:

- Establish a Chief Knowledge Officer Position

The decentralized management style of “Aries Inc.” has led to different knowledge management problems that are due to the lack of company strategy on what knowledge should

be made available, its location, and how it is acquired. Also, other reported problems were due to how to communicate and deal with knowledge, how to efficiently use the knowledge, and what the most relevant technologies to adopt in order to implement an efficient system are. To solve these problems, the owner must be responsible for coordinating all related activities. Consequently, a chief knowledge officer has to be hired with a key business purpose to set a company strategy for knowledge management in general.

- Develop Specialized Training Programs

In order to shove new staff members of the professional services team to use the new knowledge efficiently, a specialized training program has to be developed to all new hires. Also, the previous generations of professional services staff members are efficiently using the training program, all old members of the professional services team have to be given refreshment training and update the training program.

- Establish a multidisciplined “Aries Inc.” knowledge management integration team

This team will work on organizational and knowledge management technical and continuous amelioration teams. The opening tasks assigned to the team will be to do the following:

- Organize in such a way that all “Aries Inc.” interests and disciplines are represented.

- Decide clear and measurable business and technical processes.

- Recognize areas where activities overlap and make a business plan which involves

management and technical needs, with metrics to measure the success or default of the attempt.

- Develop a Communication Mechanism Between the professional services staff members and the Content Owners

It was shown that the lack of communication between the staff members and the owners of the different Web sites leads to problems related to information relevance, completeness,

importance, and richness. The owners of the Web sites must be enlightened about what exactly the Web sites' users need, and how and when knowledge should be published. Presently, there is no defined mechanism for the users to connect with the sites' owners. That is why, such mechanism should be put in place. One probable solution is to use e-mail surveys.

Technological needs

The "Aries Inc." professional services team was facing technological challenges even though it was very skilled in responding to the fast-paced changes in technology. In the past, it had Web allowed all of the products, creating ample use of technologies like as HTML, java script and so on. The professional services team continued development attempts and had found a niche in developing CoP workspaces for customers. A CoP is a network of people who share a common goal. CoP workspaces are virtual environments where members of these CoPs can interchange information to complete work tasks and decide problems. (Mentzas, Apostolou, Young, Abecker, 2008). The professional services team became so effectual in making workspaces which could hand over a "CoP in a box" with a few minor customer-particular pinches in only a few days' time. The professional services team now simply provided the software framework and the customer became answerable for adding the information and knowledge. However, the CoP workspace component had been a significant addition to the "Aries Inc." knowledge management system as it had resulted in immediate benefits to various customers and helped to spread the word about the "Aries Inc." knowledge management efforts. Development of CoPs might, in time, provide a central focus for the "Aries Inc." knowledge management professional services team's development efforts. Along with this development, however, another technological challenge had arisen with the development of the "Aries Inc." portal. This raised a key question

of how to design future “Aries Inc.” knowledge management system applications. How could the “Aries Inc.” knowledge management Team take advantage of “Aries Inc.” portal capabilities? Would the knowledge management system lose its identity and mission with the establishment of the “Aries Inc.” portal? Would the “Aries Inc.” Portal provides new collaboration tools that would conflict or supersede those developed by the team at the company? These questions, again, made a clear future strategy very difficult for “Aries Inc.” to envision. There are some recommendation descriptions.

- Develop a technology evaluation and sanction mechanism that explicitly links requirements for new information technology to process improvements that impact mission accomplishment and customer satisfaction.

As organizations have begun to identify the value of knowledge management to their future well-being, technology providers have been squeezing to recast their data warehousing, intranet, document management, workflow, and so forth, products and the ultimate knowledge management solution. All of these providers fall short in that knowledge management decisions are not “one size fits all” but, rather, organization particular. Without a business strategy, there is no rational origin to evaluate the various technology solutions and craft a knowledge management toolkit that delivers merit to the organization and its customers. Organizational evaluation, then, needs to initial with an estimation of the mission and business strategy.

- Survey “Aries Inc.” Web sites and identify improvements to increase their effectiveness in creating knowledge available to the users.

When Web technology was new and viewed as an addition to accomplishing work, efficiency did not seem significant. Web engineers were more worried with the eye appeal and user friendliness of the site than whether it supplied valuable information. Users readily

acknowledged the fact that they would be guided through several Web sites before accessing any relevant information. Today, however, the Web is a key work tool for many of “Aries Inc.”’s personnel, that is why lessening in search and retrieval time and one-click access to information is no longer an option but a necessity. All “Aries Inc.” Web sites should be reviewed for their ability to provide value-added knowledge to the workforce.

- Develop a working group to curtail redundancy in transactional databases.

Much of the knowledge management literature is focused on cooperation and the extraction of tacit knowledge. However, the base of an organization’s knowledge and the source of many of its business metrics are found in its rather mundane workhorse transactional data systems. Some workers annotated on their inability to trust the data without autonomous validation, they said that the same data element could be found in manifold sources with various values. (N) Technology in and of itself cannot solve this problem, but enforcing the rules of good data management may go a long way to establishing believe in the data.

- Develop a task force to improve the catch of tacit knowledge from CoP designated experts.

Each CoP has its own set of expert and tacit knowledge that should be caught and put in the company’s knowledge repositories. The permeate dilemma is that expert knowledge is the most hard to obtain because it is often ill-defined (knowledge holders do not know what they should be contributing) and difficult to provide (experts are usually too busy to provide this knowledge). Every CoP has its novices, apprentices, masters, and gurus. Each of these experience levels has an supposition for the knowledge that is required to do work. An effective knowledge management system should catch knowledge from the top of the experience pyramid and pass that knowledge down and through the CoP.

Management needs

Management in “Aries Inc.” is a crucial factor. There is a pure problem in the management, as there is no single owner of that task. Also, content is not centrally managed, which rules to inconsistency problems. Other management issue is the absence of content in some particular areas like integration with some products. Due to the current decentralized management aspect, this subject has never been accessed. In addition, “Aries Inc.” has not determined strategy that defines what entirely should be made available in the knowledge base, nor its location or how it is to be acquired. The definite knowledge is shared because it is published on the local intranet Web sites or because it is made available through the company’s portal; but the "Aries Inc." has no defined strategy or any type of mechanism that encourages its employees to share their personal tacit knowledge. Therefore, the important problem is to instill “Aries Inc.”’s culture that encourages and rewards knowledge sharing. As a solution several actions have been recommended.

- Make a knowledge management plan with a centralized long-range strategy.

Establish a clear road map so that the big picture can be articulated to all groups; this includes leadership assist of the decisions communicated. The communications plan should clearly define why a project is being done and the profits to the employees. This should support the mission/vision of “Aries Inc.” in regards to process improvement. Document the strategy and create a plan to achieve the strategy and explain how each project assists the mission/vision. Develop a pure vocabulary for communication of ideas across teams; standardization of vocabulary for connection of ideas across groups is essential. Initiate team-building activities to

foster relationships across the organization (dialogue, inquiry vs. advocacy). Balance being a imaginary against accomplishment of jobs.

- Perform an Organizational Cultural Inventory across “Aries Inc.”

“The Organisational Culture Inventory provides a profile of an organisation's operating culture in terms of the behaviours that members believe are required to “fit in and meet expectations” within their organisation. It measures "how things are done around here.” (Prusak, 2008). The Organizational Cultural Inventory expands the point-in-time picture of the “Aries Inc.” culture collected in this report to include a broader pool. The Organizational Cultural Inventory pinpoints 12 particular types of behavioral norms which focus on behavioral patterns that members believe are required to adapt the expectations of the company. Norms are organized into three common clusters that recognize between constructive cultures, passive/defensive cultures, and aggressive/defensive cultures.

- Establish a knowledge management transition plan from running practices to the new knowledge management system.

Make a plan of action identifying those items that are assisting and hindering "Aries Inc." from going toward their business direction; define the current state of organization, the wished state, and what should happen during the transition from one to another. This transition plan should involve both internal and exterior transformations within the organization and do the following:

- Establish clear documentation, which describes roles, responsibilities, and boundaries within “Aries Inc.”

Create a detailed corporate plan on how business is to be conducted in “Aries Inc.” and with its customers.

- Shift the Corporate Culture

One of the important problems facing "Aries Inc." is the incompleteness of available information regarding the integration with other vendors' products. A fine part of such knowledge is a tacit one that company members develop over time through their experience obtained in full installation. "Aries Inc."s top management must make an environment that encourages employees to continuously share what they know. The centerpiece of that environment is interactive learning, which occurs either through work experience or connection with fellow practitioners. The clue to interactive learning is the offer and take that happens when the company members share knowledge. A lack of time is a major obstacle to this process, and "Aries Inc." must find ways for its professional services members to share what they know.

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